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## Fashion industry professionals' viewpoints on creative traits and, strategies for creativity development

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# Fashion industry professionals' viewpoints on creative traits and, strategies for creativity development

## Abstract

Through in-depth interviews, the study explored fashion industry professionals' viewpoints, on creativity, focusing on traits of creative people and how creativity can be developed. Four creative, traits were identified, including different thought processes, determination, having an open mind, and, risk taking. About one-third of participants believed that creativity is innate, and therefore, some, people were born creative whereas others were not. Another third of participants maintained that, everyone has some creative potential that can be further developed. The remaining fashion, professionals distinguished artistic creativity from creative problem solving. Suggested strategies for, creativity enhancement and development included (1) practicing creative thinking strategies, (2), formal training, (3) diverse experiences and exposure to the world; and (4) creating a safe, yet, challenging environment.

## Keywords

Fashion industry, Creative traits, Development strategies

## Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society | Fashion Design | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts | Industrial and Product Design | Place and Environment

## Comments

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# **Fashion Industry Professionals' Viewpoints on Creative Traits and Strategies for Creativity Development**

## **1. Introduction**

Creativity has been studied from the diverse perspectives of business, cognitive science, philosophy, psychology, and art, among others (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Creativity's multi-dimensional nature, which encompasses individual traits and behaviors as well as the interaction between creative individuals, their ideas, and society, makes it difficult to define and capture the phenomenon (Runco, 2004). According to creativity experts, human creative potential is a virtually limitless resource that defies racial, social, economic, and gender categorization ("Engineering Research..." 2006; Florida, 2002). Creativity can be cultivated, developed, and practiced (Michalko, 2006). The suggested ways in which to increase creativity vary, however. Popular press titles include strategies such as journaling, daily artistic and reflective activities, games, and heeding intuitive beliefs and feelings (Maisel, 2000; Makridakis, 2013; von Oech, 2003).

In the global and highly competitive fashion industry creativity is very important. According to Jennings (2011), "creativity is the backbone of fashion design" (p.13). Other researchers argue that regardless of the primary job focus, from creative design to sales to museum work, creativity, and especially creative problem solving, is essential in the fashion business (Karpova, Marcketti, & Barker, 2011). Despite its importance, there have been a limited number of studies on creativity within the fashion field. Danielson (1986) surveyed fifty-five contemporary fashion illustrators to provide insight into their creative processes to enrich classroom teaching on the subject. Eckert and Demeid (2001) analyzed the ways in which the design process was influenced by differing business models of knitwear companies. The

researchers examined the ways in which students and professionals used sources for inspiration for knitwear design. A qualitative investigation that focused on British fashion designers advocated for research on innovation in the creative industries (Malem, 2008). At the 2008 Apparel Executive Forum keynote presentation, Patty Devlin of Play, a consulting company, urged designers to “seek a diversity of inspiration” by incorporating different perspectives in the workplace, becoming comfortable with ambiguity, and promoting risk-taking or “passion in action.” key aspects identified in the literature for enhancing creativity (Speer, 2008).

Professionals in creative industries observe, practice, exchange, adapt, and cultivate creative strategies as part of their daily routines. Documenting, interpreting, and understanding their experiences, views, and insights regarding creativity will help advance our knowledge about this complex and important phenomenon. This study explored fashion industry professionals’ viewpoints on traits of creative people and how creativity can be developed. Educators can utilize the information presented in the study to better understand the creativity phenomenon as experienced by industry insiders and use the strategies mentioned to enhance their students’ creativity. In the same vein, industry practitioners can use the research findings to cultivate their own creativity as well as that of their employees.

### **1.1. Traits of Creative People**

The research on the relationship between personality and creativity is well established and has grown in popularity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Feist, 1998; Furnham & Bachtier, 2008; Selby, Shaw, & Houtz, 2005). Many personal characteristics have been associated with creativity (Selby et al., 2005). One of the pioneering studies analyzed United States’ Air Force captains, and determined that certain characteristics were correlated with creativity including a preference

for complexity, independent judgment in a group situation, dominance, and impulsiveness (Barron, 1955).

Building on Barron (1955), MacKinnon (1962) assessed the relationship between creativity and personality in well known, highly creative architects. He supported Barron's findings by noting a strong correlation between creativity and preference for complexity. Other important characteristics identified included motivation to achieve, flexibility in thought, self-acceptance, and self-confidence. Due to the intense and somewhat arduous nature of creativity, creative individuals must be passionate (Rentzulli, Koehler, & Fogarty, 2006; Selby et al., 2005). This passion provides the much needed discipline, motivation, and focused energy needed in creativity (Rentzulli et al., 2006; Amabile; 1989). Numerous other studies reported various traits associated with creativity. These included divergent thinking, openness, and preference for challenge (Amabile, 1989; Furnham & Bachtiar, 2008; Rentzulli, Sytsma, & Berman, 2000).

Researchers have argued that creativity requires steps beyond cognition. Sternberg (1985; 2006) concluded that creative thinking was comprised of three skills: (a) seeing problems outside of conventional boundaries, (b) differentiating between ideas worth pursuing and those that were not, and (c) marketing one's ideas to others. Lubart and Sternberg (1997) established a correlation between taking risks and being creative. However, they suggested this correlation was present only in specific domains. For example, the correlation between taking risks and levels of creativity was significant among artists, but not fiction writers. Despite many efforts devoted to determining which traits can serve as predictors of creativity, there has been little agreement on creative personal characteristics.

## **1.2. Developing Creativity**

Since the 1990s, there has been increased interest in creativity training (Mumford, 2003). Various strategies for creativity development have been proposed and tested (Bull, Montgomery, & Baloché, 1995; Selby et al., 2005; Sternberg, 2006). Torrance (1987), in a two-part study, evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies: (1) Osborn-Parnes Creative Problem Solving program which included brainstorming and productive thinking, divergent thinking strategies, questioning assumptions, and creative problem solving techniques; (2) interdisciplinary approaches; (3) use of packaged materials (e.g., those by Purdue Creativity Program); (4) use of media and reading to practice skills; (5) emphasis on practice through artistic endeavors; (6) favorable learning environment; and (7) external motivation (e.g., rewards). Part one of his study analyzed 143 studies of creativity training courses used with children from kindergarten through grade 12. The most effective strategies included the Osborn-Parnes program and interdisciplinary approaches. The least effective strategy was an attempt to create an ideal learning environment. Part two of the study analyzed a total of 242 studies: 166 at the elementary and secondary levels and 76 at the college/adult level. When applying divergent thinking to real life scenarios, such as developing and evaluating new products, the college/adult level students had a much higher success rate than grade school students. Torrance (1987) concluded that training and practice in real-life problem solving improved creativity.

More recently, Bull et al. (1995) explored formal creativity training from an educational perspective. After reviewing 67 creativity course syllabi, the authors surveyed 103 creativity instructors and asked them to identify the importance of course criteria. The instructors responded that general theories and models were of very little importance; rather, they emphasized using humor, imagination, analogy/metaphor, and increasing student understanding of creativity. One of the highest ranked criteria was having a safe environment where students

91 felt secure and free to explore their creativity. Other highly ranked criteria included eliminating  
92 creativity blocks and creating a climate that fostered creativity.

93 Scott, Leritz, and Mumford (2004) outlined six methods for developing creativity: (1)  
94 changing or improving the environment; (2) motivating through incentives; (3) building  
95 expertise; (4) enhancing career development experiences; (5) facilitating group work and  
96 interaction; and (6) training and education, which was the most favored. The most successful  
97 training programs focused the development of training content on the core practices of  
98 opportunity recognition, idea generation, and idea evaluation (Scott et al., 2004).

99 Cropley (1997) and Nickerson (1999) disagreed on the length of time needed to develop  
100 creativity. Cropley insisted that creativity could not be developed through short term  
101 intervention. His strategy for teaching creativity relied on five principles: (1) building skills; (2)  
102 practicing these skills through exercises; (3) encouraging novelty; (4) evaluating students'  
103 progress and errors openly; and (5) giving a mixture of group and individual assignments. The  
104 author stressed that students needed to learn and practice creative thinking skills over time.  
105 Nickerson (1999) agreed that practice was necessary, but held that short term interventions were  
106 successful when they focused on honing specific skills. Those skills could then be practiced  
107 throughout a lifetime.

108 Scholars suggest that there are varying levels of creativity. Selby et al. (2005) identified  
109 four levels of creativity: (1) not yet evident; (2) emerging; (3) expressing; and (4) excelling.  
110 Similarly, Sternberg (2006) highlighted different types of creativity from "minor replications to  
111 major redefinitions" (p. 95). Sternberg's studies of elementary, middle school, and high school  
112 participants, suggested that students performed better when instruction was tailored to each

child's ability level. It was noted that in order to be effective educators, instructors must understand their own creativity (Selby et al., 2005; Sternberg 2006).

Identifying creative traits and nurturing them in students and young professionals today is more important than ever (Florida, 2002). A National Science Foundation's report urged that creative individuals within all disciplines will be central for continued U.S. prosperity and security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century ("Engineering Research..." 2006). Recently, however, research indicates that for the first time in decades, American creativity is declining (Bronson & Merryman, 2010).

## 2. Method

To explore fashion industry professionals' views on traits of creative people and how creativity can be nurtured in individuals, a qualitative methodology was used to obtain "rich" or "thick" data (Esterberg, 2002). This approach allowed participants to talk about the topic in their own words and describe their everyday experiences, ideas, and opinions (van Manen, 1990). To address the purpose of the study, the authors developed an interview protocol consisting of open ended questions. Following the interview protocol ensured a systematic approach to data collection (Kvale, 1996). Participants were asked to talk about their professional preparation and career path in the industry. Questions regarding traits of creative individuals and how creativity could be developed and strategies for that purpose were also asked. Examples of questions from the interview protocol included: "Please describe positions/jobs in your company that require creative people? Could you give examples?", "What characteristics do these creative people have?", "Do you think creativity can be developed? Do you think it can be taught? Why? How can it be fostered?" Probing questions were used to encourage participants to provide additional information. Prior the interview, each participant was informed that (1) the researchers were



interested in their personal opinions and viewpoints and (2) her/his responses and identities would remain confidential, in that quotes and research results would not be linked to their or their companies' names.

The research was approved by the institutional review board of a land-grant Midwestern University. A purposive, snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit research participants and ensure collection of relevant data (Esterberg, 2002). The authors contacted graduates of their apparel program and invited them to participate in the study. The program has both design and merchandising specializations, and both are in the top twenty fashion design and fashion merchandising programs in the USA, according to the 2013 Fashion Schools' rating (2013a; 2013b). The program awards Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, and Doctor of Philosophy degrees and has a total of 500+ students. At the end of the interview, each participant was asked to recommend other industry professionals to invite to participate in the research. Individual, semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect the data. Each participant received the interview protocol in advance so that they had a chance to review the questions prior to the interview. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio taped. The length of the interviews ranged from one to two hours. All interviews were transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

A phenomenological interpretive approach was used to analyze the data. First, interview transcripts were analyzed by the researchers individually through an iterative part-to-whole process (McCracken, 1988). The analyses and interpretation resulted in the emergence of significant themes that described participants' experiences and perceptions related to creative people and creativity development (van Manen, 1990). Next, the researchers worked together to compare, discuss, and finalize emergent themes into a consistent whole utilizing a back-and-

forth, part-to-whole process of interpretation (Spiggle, 1994). The data analysis process revealed saturation, in which concepts became redundant, i.e., thoroughly explained and reiterated by the interview participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Thus, the researchers' stopped collecting data. The final themes were shared with the apparel program's industry advisory board members, who had no objections, nor further suggestions regarding the research results.

## **2.1. Participants**

Twenty-eight fashion industry professionals were interviewed. Professionals came from diverse company backgrounds, positions, regions of the country, and with a range of 2 to 30 years of experience in the industry. Half of the participants had been working in the industry between 5 and 9 years. One quarter of the participants had been in the industry between 10 and 20 years, and another seven professionals had been working in the industry for between 21 and 30 years. Twenty out of the total 28 participants graduated from the apparel program with which the researchers are associated. These participants graduated from the program between 2 to 25 years ago. Professionals represented small, medium, and large size firms located throughout the United States. Half of the participants were from the Northeast region (New York City) that is considered the center of the U.S. fashion industry (Rantisi, 2002). Ten professionals were from the Midwestern region, where the apparel program is located. The rest of the participants were from the South or Southwestern region.

In this study, industry was defined as a cluster of related businesses, including manufacturing, distribution, auxiliary, research/consultant and educational institutions (Rantisi, 2002; Scott, 2006). We strived to recruit participants who represented a wide range of companies and jobs/positions within the industry. Companies in the study were from mass market and specialty retailers to manufacturers and apparel import intermediaries to designer's houses and

educational institutions. All companies were involved in some part of the apparel supply chain from product design and development, production, distribution, wholesale, and retail. In terms of jobs, participants represented both design and business sides of the industry. For example, five participants were lead or associate designers and two were product development managers. Four had a position of vice president (VP) of design or creative director/product development director. One participant was VP of merchandising and two were VP of sales. Four professionals were entrepreneurs. Three professionals were educators, all with significant (15+ years) fashion industry experience.

Reflecting the gender distribution of most fashion programs, the majority of interviewees were females; five participants (18%) were male. Due to stipulations of the companies and as stated in the informed consent document provided to participants, no participant or company names are utilized. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper. It should be noted that none of the participants received formal creative thinking courses, workshops, seminars, or other training. **This was appropriate for our research purpose: to explore fashion industry professionals' viewpoints on traits of creative people and how creativity can be developed.**

### 3. Results

Interpretive analyses of the interviews narrative resulted in eleven major themes. The themes formed three topical areas: (a) traits of creative people, (b) origins of creativity, and (c) strategies for developing creativity. The three topical areas explored fashion industry professionals' experiences and viewpoints on characteristics of creative people and development of creativity.

#### 3.1. Topical Area One: Traits of Creative People

Participants consistently discussed four traits of creative people. These included: (a) different thought processes; (b) determination; (c) having an open mind; and (d) risk taking.

### *3.1.1. Different Thought Processes*

Participants insisted that, based on their experiences, creative people were typically set apart by their different thought processes. As May, a vice president of sales for an apparel manufacturing company, explained, “Creativity to me is thinking of things in a new way.” One of the often used creative thinking descriptors was the ability to look at a problem from different perspectives: “...looking at something in a different way” (Lana, chief officer, merchandising). Another common response was deriving multiple, rather than just one, possible solutions to a problem. This was perceived as critical to the creative thinking process: “You have to have that mind where you want to think of ten ways to fix it” (Ella, a designer for a high-end fashion company). Participants believed that creative people tended to have multiple and diverse inputs (perceptions of a problem) as well as outputs (ideas or solutions) that led to evidence of their creativity.

### *3.1.2. Determination*

Another quality of creative people discussed by the participants can be described as “determination.” Fashion professionals talked about an internal or intrinsic motivation that drove creative people to not give up easily and to have passion and persistence. For example, “You have to have that drive and that passion to want to figure things out and to be creative in that way and to try hard!” (Ella, a designer). According to Lynn, a vice president of merchandising, “It takes the willingness, the drive to be able to *want* to get it done.” In addition to passion, participants believed that it was critical to have determination and persistence to see ideas realized: “If I put my mind to something, I’ll follow through and do it. Some people are not that

way. I'm very self-motivated" (Jess, a designer). Another professional agreed: "I don't take 'no' for an answer" (Lana, a chief officer, merchandising). Participants agreed that creative people thrive in a challenging environment. They become bored with a routine and create challenges for themselves. Moreover, they challenge people around them by constantly asking questions and proposing new ideas. As Travis, a vice president of design explained, "You're challenging everything, every status quo, at every level. I mean, I challenge everyone [I work with]. I challenge production people all the time. I'm challenging merchants. I'm challenging factories."

### *3.1.3. Risk Taking*

New ideas are often associated with risk. Participants believed that willingness to take risks is a characteristic of creative people: "Taking risks, trying something new, not being afraid of [the] unknown" (Helen, a sales manager). This quality was frequently described as "pushing the envelope." A certain degree of self-confidence was needed to be willing to expose yourself, along with your ideas, to others' critiques: "You have to be willing to...just speak up your mind and tell them what you think. That is kind of scary, but much appreciated in the industry because if you have a great idea but you don't say anything, no one will know" (Alice, a senior business analyst). Another professional stated lack of motivation and fear as a reason people do not take risk. James, a creative director stated: "Why are you willing to risk? You have a good life. You know, you have everything you need. Why risk everything you have?" Clara, a fashion educator, summarized this characteristic, "The creative individuals are those that are not afraid to fail and not afraid to have something to go wrong. ...I think to be really creative you have to be willing to take risk."

### *3.1.4. Having an Open Mind*

Participants noted that having an open mind was an essential trait of creative people. According to Bob, an associate designer, “I think creativity is like welcoming all positions and opinions on things and to not discredit people because their ideas are not the same as yours. So creativity to me is open-mindedness.” Being open-minded also included characteristics of adaptability and flexibility, “Some people are more flexible and have more open thought process. So, they might do better in creativity” (Lana, a chief officer, merchandising).

Even after identifying specific traits and characteristics of creative individuals such as different thinking processes, determination, risk taking, and having an open mind, the creativity phenomenon remained something of a mystery to the participants. One participant expressed his amazement with the wonder of creative thinking: “And they think about something in a completely different way! I’m...just... ‘How in the hell did he think of that?’” (Travis, a vice president of design). It was not easy for the participants to precisely state distinguishing creativity traits. As a result, some participants relied on platitudes to define creativity, such as “thinking outside the box” or “having a fresh eye.”

### **3.2. Topical Area Two: Origins of Creativity**

This topical area explored fashion industry professionals’ viewpoints on the origins of creativity—whether it was innate or if it could be acquired and learned. Participants’ opinions on the topic formed three almost equal groups. Slightly more than one-third of the participants believed that everyone can be creative (11 professionals). This group agreed that creativity is a skill that can be learned, practiced, and mastered. In contrast, slightly less than one-third of the participants viewed creativity as an inborn trait, meaning that some people are born creative while others are not (9 professionals). The remaining professionals (8 participants) approached the question depending upon how they defined creativity, as either a creative problem-solving

skill or an artistic talent. This group believed that creative problem-solving skills can be taught much more easily than artistic creativity, which might be impossible for everyone to acquire. It should be noted that all three groups were well represented by artistically talented professionals, i.e. fashion designers, as well as professionals from the business side of the industry including buyers and merchandisers.

### *3.2.1. Everyone is Creative*

Eleven participants believed that all people have a creative potential. Accordingly, they maintained that everyone can be creative through developing the way one thinks and practicing creative thinking strategies: “I think creativity can be taught, to some extent. Some people are more creative than others, but you definitely can learn it. You can learn, you know, to develop your mind” (Clara, a fashion educator). Dave, a freelance designer, agreed, “Yes, it can be taught, to an extent. I think there’s a natural ability to be creative, as well as self-developed, or taught creativity.”

This group of participants believed that everyone who *wants* to be creative can learn creative thinking skills through work and practice, “It does take a lot of practice and if people are constantly challenged and have to stretch their brain” (Lana, chief officer, merchandising). In addition, motivation and determination were cited as critical to the process of becoming creative; even if the skills and behaviors might come easier to some individuals than others. According to Kelly, a fashion educator, “You can teach creativity. It’s just harder for some. Some are very visual, and very talented, and it comes very easily to them. And I think you can become a lot better at it. It’s like a piano player. Some people can just sit down and play the piano, and others have to practice.”

### *3.2.2. Not Everyone Is Creative*

296           Nine participants believed that some people are naturally creative, while others are not.  
297   When trying to explain the reasons behind the difference, participants used words such as  
298   ‘intuition’ or ‘gut feeling’. May, a designer, explained this relevant to her creative design  
299   domain: “[Creativity is] to have an intuitive sense, to have an intuitive understanding of what is  
300   attractive or new.” She stressed that one can further enhance creativity if he/she had an “innate  
301   sense of creativity to begin with.” Similarly, another professional maintained that creativity was  
302   an innate trait, “You either have it, or you don’t, in a sense. You can teach people to use  
303   resources that are out there to get ideas. But you have to have some of it just ingrained in you”  
304   (Alice, a senior business analyst). In the same vein, Helen, a sales manager for a designer’s  
305   house, offered another explanation: “I think you either have it, or you don’t. It’s not a formula. It  
306   comes from your gut.”

307           These participants agreed that creativity could be developed, or enhanced in people who  
308   are born creative. Consequently, they maintained creativity cannot be taught to people who were  
309   born uncreative. As Sandy, a lead designer, noted, “I do think that, unfortunately, some people  
310   are really not creative. Their minds just don’t really work that way. I’m not sure if you can truly  
311   teach creativity. You definitely can develop it [if you have it].” Travis, a vice president of design,  
312   went further and divided all people into three groups in terms of creative potential and  
313   manifestation, “There’re some people who get it very quickly. There’re some who have it, and  
314   they don’t realize they have it, and they have to tap into it and figure out how to dust off all  
315   roadblocks that they have. And then there’re some people that just can’t do it. It’s just not in  
316   their DNA. It’s not something that they can do.” This group maintained that people naturally had  
317   different potential in creativity, “I think some people will never be creative because they just



can't be. In the same way some people can't think logically, or can't process something that's happening that's not supposed to happen" (Tracy, a textile designer).

### *3.2.3. Problem Solving versus Artistic Creativity*

Finally, eight professionals distinguished between creative problem solving and artistic creativity. Consequently, this determined the group's view on teaching creativity, "Can creativity be taught? It depends on what type of creativity. There are different types of creativity. There's problem solving, and there's design" (Amber, an associate designer). Like Natalie, an apparel store owner, these participants believed that not everyone can learn artistic creativity but problem solving skills could be taught to anyone, "Yes, you can teach creativity, and it may not apply to the creativity in the artistic aspect, but the entrepreneurial thinking, the problem solving type of creativity."

These participants agreed that everyone is capable of learning and applying creative problem solving strategies, "You can teach problem solving skills. Everybody can be shown that there are different options and different way of thinking through things" (Lana, chief officer, merchandising). However, these professionals also believed that artistic creativity required a preexisting potential, and while everyone can take art lessons, the outcomes depended upon the student's innate talent:

I think certain level of design creativity can be taught. After a while, you can learn the taste level. But there's only a certain level. I think, only certain people can be designers.

Either you've got it, or you don't. (Amber, an associate designer)

Not everybody has that aesthetic or creative eye. I think everybody can think creatively if you train them, but I'm not sure that everybody has that eye to just put things together:

color, balance, etc. And I think, probably, some of the aesthetic creativity can be taught, although some of it seems to be innate to me. (Clara, a fashion educator)

### **3.3. Topical Area Three: Strategies for Developing Creativity**

Participants discussed various ways and approaches to enhancing creativity. They formed four themes, or strategies for developing creativity: (a) formal training; (b) practicing creative thinking; (c) exposure to the world; and (d) safe, yet challenging environment.

#### *3.3.1. Formal Training*

Some participants agreed that creativity could be developed through formal training such as courses or workshops which did not have to be related to one's profession or college major. For example, Don, a vice president of sales, advocated for art courses for developing creativity, "Definitely through art classes, you know, such as drawing, painting, even music. Something that isn't related to the field you are in." Elizabeth, an associate designer, noted a creative fashion design course she took in college helped increase her creativity "I thought that class was really cool. It definitely made me think outside the box." Beyond college courses, formal training might include short workshops or seminars offered on-site by employer or at professional meetings. Amber, an associate designer, explained, "[At work], we have different seminars and workshops all the time, where you can go and learn things."

#### *3.3.2. Practicing Creative Thinking*

Professionals commented that creativity could be enhanced by learning and practicing creative thinking. One of the suggested strategies was dissecting a problem and breaking it down into achievable parts. As James, a creative director, explained, "Once you get a problem, you look at it and then you dissect it. You kind of slice it up and you figure out, "Ok, this is the one thing I can tackle." As opposed to most people [who] see the whole thing and say, "I don't know

what to do!” They freak out and walk away. So, what I do is I look at the problem and I break it down into steps. This is a creative process.” Kelly, a fashion educator, agreed, “The problem actually might not be the most visible thing. The problem might be something that’s hidden behind another situation. This ability to dissect a problem, figure out what’s important, and then find the solution that meets the needs. That’s where the creativity comes in.” Another strategy for approaching a problem was to look at it from different perspectives, which might lead to unique and original solutions. Sandy, a lead designer, suggested, “Just working your mind around a problem from lots and lots of different angles is really the way to do it.”

Participants agreed that coming up with multiple answers, or solutions, to a problem was critical for creative outcomes. Lana, a chief merchandising officer, believed that students can develop the skill of seeing different answers over time, as a result of practice: “Tell students to sketch twelve blouses, all with different collars and different sleeves. They are probably going to come up with the first six or seven pretty easily and the last five, it’s going to be like: “Ugh!” Then next week it could be: Come up with twelve different high-heeled shoes. The more you do it, the easier it gets since you’re able to stretch your mind and think of different things.” Kyla, a director of product development, commented that while there are many ways to stimulate creativity, it was important “...to foster an environment of thinking of things in a new way and looking at different vehicles, always looking for options.” Amber, an associate designer, summarized creative thinking strategies as follows, “It is not to look at black and white. It is getting people to look outside the box. Don’t just come up with a straight answer. There are multiple answers to whatever the question is.”

### *3.3.3. Exposure to the World*

It was mentioned that various cultural, artistic, and other types of activities and events, including travel, were critical for creativity development. These experiences could expand one's knowledge and skills, help to develop characteristics of creative people, and be a source of inspiration. Emma, a vice president of technical design, noted, "I think traveling is a great way to kind of open your horizons. It's really important to understand other people and to understand how people live and what they perceive as beautiful. This really just opens you to ideas. Traveling is one, but also just looking around and exploring, you know, going to art museum doing things that you wouldn't normally do, pushing yourself."

Participants suggested that exposure to stimulating and diverse environments could be used by companies and educators as a way to enhance creativity. Elizabeth, an associate designer, described how her company encouraged employees to explore various places as a source of inspiration, "We have this thing called black-out week, where we basically have a week to come into the office for an hour or two, and then go out shopping and around the city to find inspirations: thrift shops, sitting in a park and sketching..." As James, a creative director, summarized this strategy for increasing creativity, "The more exposure I have to the world, the better. So, I'm constantly challenging myself to be more exposed."

#### *3.3.4. Safe, yet Challenging Environment*

Participants noted that educators can further help students develop creativity by providing challenging yet safe environments. According to Abby, a freelance stylist, "Giving room to be creative and not setting out very strict rules. You know, have high expectations, but maybe not setting up very strict rules, separating more creative people from less creative and have different demands for them, different expectations for different talents." Emma, a vice president of technical design, discussed this from a business perspective: "[Company X] really pushed

everyone in the company to think outside the box and it was really amazing because we did things we really didn't think were possible." Kris, a product development manager, added: "When it's a little bit more challenging, I feel, it makes you a little more creative, to think outside the box, to think of different ways to do things." Lana, a chief merchandising officer, reaffirmed that developing creative thinking takes practice, hard work and the right environment: "I think you can teach problem solving skills, which to me is creativity. I think it does take a lot of practice and if people are constantly challenged to."

#### **4. Discussions and Conclusions**

In this study, twenty-eight fashion industry professionals shared their viewpoints and experiences related to creative traits and strategies through in-depth interviews. Research participants used a variety of descriptors to define creative people. As a result of the analysis, four major creative traits emerged: different thought processes, determination, having an open mind, and risk taking. Professionals disagreed on the origins of creativity. About one-third of participants believed that creativity is innate, and therefore, some people were born creative whereas others were not. Another third of participants maintained that everyone has some creative potential that can be further developed. The remaining fashion professionals distinguished artistic creativity from creative problem solving. Participants that believed creativity could not be learned were primarily referring to artistic creativity. Those participants that maintained creativity could be enhanced were referring to creative problem solving. Participants suggested that formal training including classes and workshops could be effective for cultivating creativity. It was noted that constant practicing of various thinking strategies—such as approaching a problem from different perspectives, dissecting a problem into pieces to solve them individually, or coming up with multiple solutions—would help enhance creativity.

Further, it was suggested that diverse experiences and exposure to the world were essential to developing creativity. In this study, participants' backgrounds, current positions, or job types appeared to have no influence on their views on creative traits and strategies. To further investigate how these two and other factors might affect fashion industry professionals' perspectives, a larger sample and a quantitative study using a survey methodology may be employed.

Based on the themes of the three topical areas, the researchers proposed a framework to help summarize and explain fashion industry professionals' viewpoints on what might contribute to developing creativity (Figure). The left side of the figure represents strategies for cultivating creativity. The process can happen through either formal (courses, workshops) training or informal practicing creative thinking strategies, exposure to new and different experiences, as well as creating environments that helped push people outside of their comfort zones and broadened their perspectives.

Insert Figure here

The next step in the framework illustrates fashion industry professionals' viewpoints on the origins of creativity. For participants who viewed creativity as an innate gift, creativity was most often associated with artistic type of activities, such as design, music, painting, etc. Those that believed creativity could be developed often defined creativity as a form of problem solving, distinct from artistic talents. Participants indicated that artistic creativity might be very difficult if not impossible to develop in people who are not born with it. However, it can be enhanced through the use of creativity strategies. In contrast, it was concluded that everyone can develop creative problem solving skills through persistent practice. Distinguishing between innate (artistic) and developed (creative problem solving) creativity might help explain the divide

between researchers and practitioners on the origins of creativity, whether all individuals can be creative, and if it can be developed or learned.

Regardless of whether participants viewed creativity as primarily artistic expressions or problem solving skills, they described the same traits typically displayed by creative people (Figure). Professionals maintained that developing certain personality traits would advance one's creativity. Therefore, creative traits serve as a predisposition to creativity, which is frequently defined as a three-step process: problem or opportunity recognition, idea generation, and idea realization or implementation (Lemons, 2005; Mumford, 2003; Sternberg, 2006). For example, being open-minded and flexible helps an individual approach a problem from various perspectives, while being passionate and persistent helps an individual generate multiple ideas or possible solutions. Consequently, being determined, internally motivated, and open to risk taking might help produce a greater number of creative ideas as well as initiative to implement the ideas. Both creative traits and creativity are not "either/or"—either you have it, or you don't, rather they are on a continuum. Some people are naturally more willing to take risk; others might be more flexible, motivated, and/or persistent. Therefore, creative traits may be strongly manifested and developed for some but could need cultivation in others.

Interpretation of the industry professionals' viewpoints revealed findings that appear to be applicable beyond the fashion industry. Participant perspectives indicated that creative traits and strategies important in the fashion industry are similar to 'general' creative traits and strategies and can be applied for creativity development in various industries. For example, the creative traits discussed by the participants and suggested strategies to enhance creativity are not unique to the fashion industry. This finding suggests that creative traits can be cultivated in students and then applied in different domains. These results support the side of the continuing

debate that creative thinking is general rather than domain specific (Baer, 2012). Even though the proposed framework of creative traits and strategies for developing creativity (Figure) is based on viewpoints of fashion industry professionals, it appears to be transferable to other industries and contributes to understanding how creative thinking can be developed in any individual. It should be noted that the authors do not view the proposed framework as a complete and final but rather as a next step toward mapping the phenomenon of creativity.

Rather than serving as a detriment, the universality of developing creativity can be used by instructors in a wide array of fields to infuse creative thinking strategies within their courses, whether they be in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields or the humanities. Educators could use information regarding the creative traits and strategies to develop activities and assessments for students to help increase their creative outputs. In a formal classroom environment, instructors could provide opportunities for students to develop and practice creative traits such as risk taking and flexibility or experiment with different thinking approaches/styles. Employing various assessments and reflective assignments, educators might help students understand that some might be more apt to creative thinking while others can intentionally and systematically use creative thinking strategies to develop the skill.

Creativity is becoming increasingly important in not only the fast-paced and highly competitive fashion industry, but economy and society at large (DiLiello & Houghton, 2006; Ford & Gioia, 2000). Recent research suggests educational interventions are necessary for enhancing American students' creativity (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). This study provides relevant strategies to develop creativity. This research furthers our understanding of creativity by providing a holistic perspective on origins of creativity (innate or developed), preconditions (creative traits) as well as strategies for developing it. Creative thinking in individuals has been



linked to the ability to successful adaptations to the demands of daily life (Cropley, 1990).  
Finally, the framework provides a starting point for better understanding the interplay between  
individual traits and behaviors as well as the interaction between creative individuals, their ideas,  
and society.

Prior to our research, no study had examined fashion industry professionals’  
understanding of creative traits and strategies. Gaining knowledge of such understanding is  
helpful for creativity researchers as well as for educators and industry practitioners. Future  
studies might explore perspectives of professionals from other industries that are both ‘closer’  
(e.g., interior/furniture or furniture design) and ‘farther’ away from fashion design (e.g., auto,  
planes, or computer design). Emerged differences and similarities from such investigations will  
allow for a more complete mapping of the creative traits and strategies across domains. Future  
studies may examine the importance of organizational structure on creativity and the creative  
person. Since vocational personality traits tend to cluster into occupational areas (Kerr &  
McKay, 2012), future researchers could develop instruments to help students decide if a career in  
fashion suited their personalities.

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